

## Preparing Materials for the Teaching of Reading

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### ABSTRACT

*Many business people need to be quickly able to read, understand and be better informed by reading about business in English. Teacher can help them by making lessons based on authentic materials a regular feature of the course and keeping a record of the vocabulary and expressions that they learn and recycling this in tests and subsequent lessons. And, of course, many business people simply want to feel at ease when they talk in English.*

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Basic principles are one thing to give students an article that they find interesting and satisfying to read – and quite another thing to give them an article to read in class (even if it is an interesting and relevant one) that is so difficult for them to understand that they have problems with every third word and lose all confidence in their English. So, particularly when you start using authentic materials with them, you will need to be extremely patient and gently support them in their learning process. It is at this point where you need to make adjustments for your group to compensate for their level of comprehension and vocabulary. For this it is useful to see lessons that provide added value and a first lesson with authentic materials.

Making it interesting for everyone as you get to know your groups it will be easier for you to choose the most appropriate, relevant material – but, of course, you can always ask your groups to choose (the people in your group can even take it in turns to choose an article)! It is always worth bearing in mind, however, that if you give your groups something interesting to do with the article, then the interestingness or the relevance of the article itself can be less important!

Cut-off article: Things to look out for when cutting articles (These comments relate to an Economist article about the US Government suing the US tobacco industry. view complete article) Initials: When a company or organization is first named, it is often followed by a set of initials by which it is referred to later in the article:

“The first of these forces was a legal settlement between GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) ... and the State of New York.” So, if you have cut the first reference to the company, you will need to insert the whole name of the company plus the initials – here, “GlaxoSmithKline (GSK)” – when you first mention it in the cut version of the article. Names of people: On first mention in an article, a person is named with both their first name, surname and a brief description: Henry Waxman, a democratic congressman from California, pointed out ... “Later in the article he appears as Mr Waxman: “Alan Goldhammer, another spokesman for PhRMA, claims that Mr Waxman was relying on preliminary data.” If you have cut out the first mention of this person, remember to give his or her full name when you first mention that person.

Read it to yourself: Check the cut article through once more to yourself to make sure it makes sense and it does not feel as if there is something missing.

At intermediate level as a rule of thumb, if the students are going to read it and discuss it during a 60–90-minute lesson, then a comfortable length is between half and one and a half A4 pages in 12-point type. If the article is longer (see sample article 1), it is a good idea to shorten it (see cut article) or simply work with the first half of it (see cut off article). When your students are familiar with the content of the shortened article, then they may well be ‘hooked’ enough to read the complete article for homework – and of course there are a number of follow-up activities that can be done. As you have intermediate students, and *The Economist* is an authentic source of materials, some preparation is definitely necessary. The question is, how much of this preparation can your students do and how much preparation should you be doing? For students’ preparation of materials see Lessons that require little or no preparation. Otherwise allow yourself half an hour of preparation time for an article of 900–1200 words.

Business people often need to present ideas at meetings. Normally, the presenter informs him or herself about the proposal and presents it for discussion. This person is also able to clarify things and answer questions. In a typical language school situation, such a meeting could be about choosing a diversification project, for example – and maybe three or four such proposals could be presented and discussed. A different article, one that is relevant to his or her field of expertise, could be chosen for (or chosen by) each presenter. Of course they will need to prepare, so give them time to do this or set this for homework. Tell your students that you will take the article(s) back before the actual meeting – that way they will have to express themselves in their own words. Your students are then practicing verbal summarizing and explaining at the meeting – and you can tell them that they have to explain themselves so clearly that even a financial manager can understand! (Of course, financial managers will have to explain themselves so clearly that even an engineer/advertising executive can understand!) They will also be practicing asking and answering questions. A variation on this is to give the same article to two students, or two groups of students. They then have to look for all the arguments in the article in favor of the proposal and all the arguments in the article against the proposal – and combine this with their knowledge of the world. In the meeting they then present their arguments and debate whether to adopt the proposal or not.

Preparing a written report: A number of business people need to write reports. Normally, in business the purpose of a report is to assist managers in making an informed decision, so you can judge the effectiveness of a report on whether all the necessary information is there, and whether it is then possible to reach a decision (often yes or no) on the basis of such a report. In preparing a report, students can look at one or more articles about the same issue and combine this with their knowledge of business and of the world to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of adopting a particular course of action. After these reports have been tidied up (with the help of the trainer) they can also be distributed and read out – and used as the basis for reaching decisions in groups. Incidentally, it is often the same people who have to write reports who also have to write up the minutes of such meetings. For the preparing your materials it is important to mention the following basic principles: It is one thing to give your students an article that they find interesting and satisfying to read – and quite another thing to give them an article to read in class (even if it is an interesting and relevant one) that is so difficult for them to understand that they have problems with every third word and lose all confidence in their English. See lessons that provide added value and a first lesson with authentic materials.

Making it interesting for everyone: As you get to know your groups it will be easier for you to choose the most appropriate, relevant material – but, of course, you can always ask your groups to choose (the people in your group can even take it in turns to choose an article)! It is always worth bearing in mind, however, that if you give your groups something interesting to do with the article, then the interestingness or the relevance of the article itself can be less important!

An authentic materials preparation program: Allow half an hour of preparation time for an article of 900–1200 words Sample article 1, during which you can do the following: Cut the article, making sure that what is left still makes sense Cut article (see things to look out for when cutting articles) or Cut the article at the point where it has become interesting but not everything has been said ... Cut-off article Things to look out for when cutting articles (These comments relate to an *Economist* article about the US Government suing the US tobacco industry. view complete article) Initials: When a company or organization is first named, it is often followed by a set of initials by which it is referred to later in the article:

“The first of these forces was a legal settlement between GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) ... and the State of New York.”

So, if you have cut the first reference to the company, you will need to insert the whole name of the company plus the initials – here, “GlaxoSmithKline (GSK)” – when you first mention it in the cut version of the article.

Names of people: On first mention in an article, a person is named with both their first name, surname and a brief description: Henry Waxman, a democratic congressman from California, pointed out ... “

Preparing yourself: Read the remainder of the article, making sure you understand everything – and marking all the words and expressions that you do not understand! See Words I don't know Look these up in either in a good English dictionary or, for neologisms, use Google, by first keying in define: the word you don't know for example define: escrow or define: “the expression you don't know in inverted commas” for example define: ”double jeopardy” If this doesn't work, look this up in Google without the ‘define:’ feature. And, if there is any arithmetic in the article, check that too to make sure you understand it. Arithmetic Preparing the Lexis Now mark all the lexis you feel that your students should know (see Vocabulary and expressions)

Also getting your students to work with some of the key lexis in the article before they see it will make it a lot easier and more satisfying for them to read. Some good examples of this are ‘Group work on key vocabulary’ (see lessons that require little or no preparation), ‘Matching words, expressions or word partnerships to definitions’ or ‘Focusing on a lexical area’ (see lessons that provide added value).

Asking questions: Often you can explain, or draw attention to, difficult vocabulary in your reading comprehension questions. Remember you can ask specific questions to find out if your students have understood a particular point, or you can ask broad questions for them to discuss, where many different answers are possible.

Here are some examples of specific questions (based on the cut article):

1. What is a dead duck?
2. What does “cutting the cord” mean in this article?
3. What other “handy features” can you have on a mobile phone?
4. How can fixed-mobile convergence give consumers the best of both worlds?

You can also ask specific questions like:

5. How can integrated operators save money with fixed mobile convergence?

But be careful here! Your students will probably have to understand what “integrated operators” means in order to answer the question. But if their answer is “They can save money by merging network infrastructures and doing away with separate fixed and mobile divisions.” i.e. a verbatim quotation from the article which does indeed answer the question – it still does not indicate to you that they have understood any of the words in their answer!

Vocabulary preparation: Divide your class into groups and give them each four or five lexical items to research and explain to the rest of the class.

It is always a good idea to present these items in the context in which they appear in the article, but you will need to alter the sentences slightly so that not too many new lexical items appear in the same sentence. Students can then demonstrate that they have understood these words and expressions by putting them into sentences of their own.

Here are some examples from the Cut-off article that you could give to your class:

First group

1. Is the fixed-line phone a dead duck?
2. If you look at the numbers and trends you might well conclude that it is.

3. Mobile phones have many handy features, such as the ability to store dozens of names and numbers, text messaging and other services.
4. It is often difficult to get a strong mobile signal indoors.

#### Second group

1. Calls are handled within the home by a small base station.
2. This is plugged into a fixed-line broadband-internet connection.
3. The base-station pretends, in effect, to be an ordinary mobile phone base-station.
4. As you enter your house, your phone “roams” on to it.
5. Calls made in this way are billed as fixed-line calls.

#### Third group

1. If you leave the house while making a call, your call will transfer seamlessly back on to the ordinary mobile network.
2. And when a friend comes to visit, her phone will use your base-station, but the charges for any calls made appear on her bill.
3. British Telecom (BT) is Britain's telecoms incumbent as a fixed-line operator.
4. BT one of the leading proponents of fixed-mobile convergence.
5. For fixed-line operators, the appeal of this idea is obvious.

#### Using broad questions

If you ask questions where a broad range of answers are possible, your students can discuss these questions using the contents of the whole article, and their own knowledge of the world, to develop as many different answers as possible.

*Here are some examples:*

Broad questions about the whole of sample article 1.

1. Is the fixed-line phone a dead duck? Why? Why not?
2. How will “fixed-mobile convergence” work?
3. What are the opportunities of fixed-mobile convergence for fixed-line operators?
4. What are “integrated operators” – and what are the advantages of fixed-mobile convergence for them?
5. How will this change the telecoms market?
6. How will these change users’ habits?
7. How should this be marketed?

You can show your class such questions before they read. They can then read the article and, in groups, they can discuss the answers to the questions (in English only, of course) before presenting them to the rest of the group.

Using broad questions with the cut-off article: Present the same questions to your class before they read the cut-off article.

Then ask your students how many of these questions, or parts of these questions, they can answer already. Then split them into groups and get them to read the cut-off article to see how many more of the questions, or parts of the questions, they can answer. (This particular article stops at an interesting point, so many businesspeople should be able to anticipate a significant amount of what follows in the rest of the article!) After they have discussed their answers with the whole class, let them read the second half of the article in their groups and pad out their answers.

Using broad questions with jigsaw reading: (This example is for a group of 12. You will have to alter this

recipe a little for groups of other sizes.) Give everyone in the class a copy of your broad questions. Split your class into four groups of three. Split the article into four pieces of approximately equal size (In my split article example based on the cut article, there is also a copy of the broad questions) and give each piece of article to each group of three people. Each group then reads their part of the article and agrees on what it means. They then discuss how many of the broad questions, or parts of them, they can answer with their part of the article. After that, each group discusses among themselves all the answers to the broad questions. A spokesperson from each group then presents their group answers to all the questions to the rest of the class.

So, particularly when you start using authentic materials with them, you will need to be extremely patient and gently support them in their learning process. It is at this point where you need to make adjustments for your group to compensate for their level of comprehension and vocabulary.

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